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INSIDE WASHINGTON

Democrats Back Chief of CIA

By ROBERT S. ALLEN and
JOHN A. GOLDSMITH

WASHINGTON — President-elect Richard M. Nixon is being strongly urged to retain career-man Richard Helms in his present job as head of the ever-controversial Central Intelligence Agency.

Helms, appointed by President Johnson in 1966, has been with CIA since the big spy agency was established in 1947. His retention would go far towards nailing down a precedent for non-political, career directors of Central Intelligence.

Some of the keep Helms sentiment is being relayed to Nixon by Democratic lawmakers. They are stressing the desirability of career continuity in CIA. They contend that the top CIA job has never been treated as a patronage plum.

They are right that, by accident or by design, no President has ever made a purely partisan appointment of a CIA director. Three of the six CIA heads to date have, in fact, been military men, insulated by their profession from partisan politics.

An all but forgotten Naval officer, Rear Adm. Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter, was the first director of Central Intelligence. He had been the head of a predecessor intelligence agency and was appointed by President Truman in 1947, when Congress established the new CIA.

President Eisenhower appointed his World War chief of staff, Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, to succeed Hillenkoetter in 1950. In 1953 Eisenhower appointed Allen W. Dulles as the first civilian director of Central Intelligence, succeeding Smith.

At that time Dulles had an extensive intelligence background. He had been active in the study process which led to the creation of a civilian agency to coordinate all the government's intelligence activities. President Kennedy, as one of his first appointments, announced that he was to name Dulles.

In 1961, after the ill-fated Bay of Pigs adventure, Democrat Kennedy named a Republican, John A. McCone, to succeed Dulles. McCone had been under secretary of the Air Force and a member of the Atomic Energy Commission in the Eisenhower Administration.

President Johnson named another military man, Adm. William P. Raborn, as McCone's successor in 1965. Helms was named as Raborn's deputy at that time. He was elevated to the top job when Raborn left it a year later.

No mention was made of Helms' politics when he appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee at the time of his appointment in 1965 and, again, in 1966. His career summary made it clear that he had never held a political job.

A reporter in Europe before World War II, Helms became an intelligence officer during the war. He has been in military and civilian intelligence jobs ever since.

He had been serving as CIA's deputy director for plans under McCone when he was selected for the number two spot with Raborn, who had been the expeditor of the highly successful Polaris submarine program and let it be known, at the outset, that he would stay in CIA for only a short period.

The transition from the hard-driving, spade-calling McCone to short-timer Raborn was a difficult one for CIA, and the elevation of one of their own was hailed by the agency's careerists.



Allen



Goldsmith

The law which created CIA bars appointment of military men to the CIA jobs. That requirement has been interpreted as requiring a civilian deputy

for an officer director, and vice versa. If President Nixon sets a career precedent by retaining Helms, the intelligence community, as presently constituted, would seem to have no lack of career talent.

Even the CIA critics agree that it has assembled an able group of employees at its nearby Langley, Va. headquarters and in overseas posts around the world. On the military side, there is the billion-dollar Defense Intelligence Agency, which coordinates separate Army, Navy and Air Force intelligence services. In addition, there is the super-secret National Security Agency, which specializes in codes, cryptography and other electronic intelligence.

Helms' performance as CIA chief and the performance of the agency under his direction is difficult to assess. No government operation in the world is under as steady a drumfire of criticism as CIA, but the agency gets generally high marks from the insiders who are familiar with the intelligence estimates which it produces.

Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford testified earlier this fall that U. S. intelligence operations have improved "substantially" in recent years. He said he accepts and believes the intelligence community's appraisals of Soviet nuclear strength and thinks there is "a higher degree of agreement" in the intelligence community about such national estimates.

Except for an early misunderstanding with Sen. J. William Fulbright, D-Ark., chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Helms has had excellent relations with Congress and the House and Senate committees which ride herd on CIA activities. Generally, Helms has, as he promised in 1966, kept CIA out of foreign policy making.

CIA operations came under fire most recently after the recent invasion of Czechoslovakia by troops from Russia and other nations of the Warsaw pact. Critics contended that CIA's warnings of such a move were deficient.

Congressional military experts, who looked carefully into those complaints, say CIA correctly charted the pre-invasion moves of the Warsaw pact armies and reported the possibility of a move into Czechoslovakia. Missing was the definite word that the Kremlin had decided to invade, and whether CIA could be expected to get that tightly-held information.

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